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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether 19 at-risk fifth-grade students would benefit from using Sustained Silent Reading. Ten students were exposed to 15 minutes of Sustained Silent Reading at least four times a week over the course of a school year, while nine students were not. All students were administered a pre- and post-self-concept inventory and a comprehension test. Results showed no significant difference between the mean reading achievements of the two samples of at-risk students, but indicated a significant difference in self concept in favor of the experimental group. (Five tables of data are included, an overview of research related to this topic, and 24 references are attached.) (Author/SR)

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The Relation Between Sustained Silent Reading to Reading Achievement and Attitude of the At Risk Student

by

Melanie Dully

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether nineteen at risk fifth grade students benefit from using Sustained Silent Reading. Ten students were exposed to fifteen minutes of Sustained Silent Reading at least four times a week over the course of a school year. Nine students did not receive the additional fifteen minutes of Sustained Silent Reading. All students were administered a pre and post self concept inventory and a comprehension test. Results supported the hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the mean reading achievement of two samples of at risk students.

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Americans place an importance on educating its youth to become productive members of society. Although the dropout problem has statistically decreased over the past decade it still exists. Various attempts to reduce the number of dropouts has been made but few of these attempt to identify at risk students early and establish to improve attitudes towards education. "Frequently, districts who provide the programs do so for students who are chronic discipline problems, those who disrupt the educational environment for everyone." (NJEA Review 1989) Although discipline problems are a concern, the needs of the at risk student should be addressed.

The issue of students dropping out of school has not only marred the educational system, but has also greatly affected society. "The annual cumulative cost of dropouts to American taxpayers is seventy-five billion in welfare benefits and lost tax revenues. Fifty-two percent of dropouts are unemployed or receiving welfare." (Kunisawa 1988) This is devastating to the public who pays tax dollars for educating its youth and then again when they drop out of school. Due to these alarming facts, society is pressuring the education field to improve the situation. Many researchers are looking at early identification programs as a route to eliminating the

problem. Educators are taking a closer look at primary grade students and patterns that pertain to dropouts. "Kaplan and Luck (1977) stated that as many as fifty percent of dropouts have been retained at least once, and Schreiber (1964) estimated that a student who failed first or second grade had an eighty percent chance of dropping out." (Larsen, Shertzer 1987) Children that are held back in the early years should be given special assistance by a school counselor and the teacher.

The dropout issue has been difficult to solve because it is multi-faceted. Students who attain low grades and have low test performances are most likely to be candidates to drop out of school. It is interesting to consider what effect Sustained Silent Reading might have on reading achievement for the at risk student. It was initially labeled Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading by Lyman C. Hunt (1970), but was later changed to Sustained Silent Reading (McCracken 1971). It would also be beneficial to find out if there is an attitude change in these students. A positive attitude change and an improvement in reading achievement would hopefully be a step toward dropout prevention.

THE HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant attitude change or difference between the mean reading achievement of two samples of at risk students, one of which uses Sustained Silent Reading over the course of a school year.

DEFINITIONS

These definitions are valuable to understand terms in this thesis.

- o at risk - students who are considered to be potentially at risk of dropping out of school.
- o Sustained Silent Reading - an uninterrupted fifteen minute period scheduled four times a week when students and the teacher read for pleasure.
- o Coopersmith Inventory - a series of questions where the student decides whether the statement is like the student or unlike the student to determine their self-concept.

PROCEDURES

In September 1988, four fifth grade teachers completed a form from the guidance counselor identifying potential "at risk" students in their class who were then assigned to a developmental reading class using a basal reader. Random assignment procedures produced two samples. The experimental sample consisted of ten students and had an additional fifteen minutes of Sustained Silent Reading

approximately four times a week. The control sample consisted of nine students who received basal instruction only. The samples were given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test to determine their IQ scores so that the equivalency between the sample groups could be established. Both groups were pretested with the California Achievement Test in April 1988 to determine if a difference in reading ability existed. Each student was also pretested with the Coopersmith Inventory to determine differences, if any, in self-concept at the outset of the study. The students were post tested in April 1989 with the California Achievement Test to determine if there were any gains in reading achievement. The Coopersmith Inventory was also readministered in June 1989 to determine gains in student self-concept.

Table I presents the mean IQ scores of both the control and experimental samples by using statistical tests.

Table I

Comparison of Mean IQ Scores of the Samples

	Mean	S.D.	t
Experimental Sample	84.3	9.78	.30
Control Sample	85.78	11.32	

A t of .30 was established which determines that the minor difference between the means is not significant. Therefore, it was concluded that the samples were well matched in intelligence

Table II illustrates a comparison of pretest scores of comprehension of the April 1988 California Achievement Test.

Table II

Comprehension Pretest Means, Standard Deviation and t

	Mean	S.D.	t
Comprehension			
Experimental	3.36	1.14	.96
Control Group	3.7	1.42	

A t of .96 was obtained which indicated that there was no significant difference in comprehension between the samples.

Table III presents a comparison of the Coopersmith Inventory which identifies the students self-concept.

Table III

Pretest Self-Concept Means

	Mean	S.D.	t
Self-Concept			
Experimental	66.2	13.90	.64
Control Group	62.9	12.73	

A t of .64 resulted which indicates again that, at the outset of this study, there was no significant difference between the two samples.

RESULTS

Table IV presents a comparison of post-test comprehension scores on the April 1989 California Achievement Test.

Table IV

Post Test Comprehension Means

Samples	Mean	S.D.	t
Experimental	4.74	.85	1.48
Control	4.03	1.19	

A t of 1.48 was obtained which indicated that there was no significant difference between the samples.

Table V presents a comparison of the Coopersmith Inventory post-test.

Table V

Post Test Self-Concept

Samples	Mean	S.D.	t
Experimental	70.2	14.32	2.62*
Control	52.5	15.0	

*Sig <.05 17DF

A $\underline{t}$ of 2.62 was obtained which indicated that there was a significant difference between the sample in self-concept at the conclusion of the study. This difference was significant below the .05 level.

Although there was no significant difference in comprehension between the samples at the conclusion of the study, it should be noted that the mean gain of the experimental sample was 1.38 years while the control sample made only a .33 gain, pretest to post test.

CONCLUSIONS

Although there was no significant difference between the mean gains in comprehension for the experimental and control samples at the conclusion of the study, a mean difference of three fourths of a grade can be said to favor the use of Sustained Silent Reading while the real gain of 1.38 grades is of high significance. Therefore, while the results seem to imply that Sustained Silent Reading has benefited the at risk student in this study, the hypothesis of this study that the use of Sustained Silent Reading will not significantly improve the reading comprehension of the at risk student is accepted since there was no significant difference between the sample means in comprehension.

Since there was a mean difference of 1.38 grades in favor of the use of Sustained Silent Reading for the at risk student, further studies need to be conducted to determine the effects of this program over a longer period of time. Since this study was conducted over the course of a school year, perhaps a study of two years would yield more positive results. The fact that the experimental sample showed significant gains in self-concept implies that Sustained Silent Reading has improved the student's self image which will hopefully keep them in school.

There is no solution that will rid society and educators of the dropout issue. However, Sustained Silent Reading seems to be promising in raising students' self image and some academic gains in reading comprehension which is one step towards brightening our future society.

Sustained Silent Reading, Reading Comprehension and Attitudes: Related Research

As educators, we stress the importance of learning, retaining knowledge, and providing students with necessary life skills. Yet, our nation is still plagued by the dropout dilemma. Twenty-five percent of our students are dropping out and fourteen million are graduating functionally illiterate. (Kunisawa 1988)

The issue of dropping out not only affects the educational system but has had damaging effects on society since they are unable to survive in today's world. "According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, fifty-three percent of seventeen year olds could not write a letter correcting a billing error. Thirty percent of Army recruits in 1982 read between the fourth and eighth grades. Only fifty-five percent of adults read a newspaper. In the nation's prisons, sixty percent of the inmates are illiterate, and eighty-five percent of juvenile offenders have reading problems. The United States illiteracy rate is four times higher than the Soviet Union's and five times higher than Cuba's." (Trelease 1985) These statistics prove the importance and need of society as a whole to combat this problem. Students who drop out of school do not acquire the skills necessary to contribute in the workforce. Insufficient background leads to low paying, dead-end jobs.

Eventually, they're unable to survive in a highly technical, competitive world. One result is unemployment which increases the need for community services, creating a burden on the city's economy. Boredom, lack of basic skills, and bleak career opportunities result in many youths disobeying the law and ending up in correctional institutions.

The present educational system must be redesigned to adjust to the personnel, cultural, and economic needs of its students. Although many Americans realize the impact dropouts have on society few will commit themselves to fully assist the crisis. "If we fail to reeducate ourselves now, it will be evident that 'We the People' - not the students - have ultimately dropped out." (Kunisawa 1988)

Although the dropout issue has been in existence for years, there has been an increase of concern on this topic. According to Russell W. Rumberger (1987), there are five reasons for this increase of concern.

1) Short term trends of dropping out has been consistent and, in some groups, the dropout problem has increased.

2) There has been an increase in minority dropouts in public schools.

3) Many districts have implemented higher academic requirements. For example, in New Jersey all students must pass the High School Proficiency Test prior to graduation or they will not receive a diploma.

4) Due to technology and restructuring of jobs, many people will need better skills to complete the tasks.

5) Politics has also taken an interest in the dropout problem. Many educational leaders are using the dropout situation to evaluate school systems. The schools are being held accountable and their performance is being judged on the dropout rate.

Yet Rhodes and McMillan (1987), in a report, still found some alarming statistics concerning dropouts.

1) Many fourteen to twenty-four year olds are no longer academically able to fill low entry jobs. Businesses are footing the bill of increased training costs.

2) Many businesses spent forty million dollars in 1985 to teach remedial courses in reading, writing, and math.

3) It costs our nation's public more than seventy-five billion dollars in unemployment, welfare, and other expenditures for dropouts and their families.

Although the dropout rate will never disappear, measures must be taken to alleviate the problem. It is costing the public a phenomenal amount of funds to

reeducate people to cope in today's world. It is the duty of the educational system to assist at risk students. In order for teachers to help with these students, they need to be able to identify these students in their classrooms. The earlier these students are identified, the sooner they are given the assistance to eradicate future failures. "Statistics show that by the time students reach the fourth grade, they have made a decision, perhaps unconsciously, of whether they want to succeed in school." (MyHre 1987)

Although there is no clear cut definition of a dropout, certain factors are associated with these youths. In 1986, the National Center for Educational Statistics came up with general characteristics of a dropout. Some characteristics are students who usually are bored, feel alienated from school, and see themselves as failures. There's a higher percentage of males than females who dropout, and they usually do poorly in basic skills such as reading and writing. Their parents did not complete high school and do not show an interest in their children's progress in school. English is usually not the primary language in the home. The family does not provide a support system for each other. Many of these at risk youths come from single parent homes. They usually come from low income families and from minority background.

Keeping these characteristics in mind, the teacher needs to recognize these students and provide for their individual needs. Educators must readjust their teaching methods and techniques to adhere to the personal needs of their students. Sustained Silent Reading is one method that addresses individual needs, makes students feel part of a group, and motivates the students to read. Lyman C. Hunt, Jr. (1970) initially labeled this method Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (U.S.S.R.). Due to a negative connotation to the title, McCracken (1971) renamed it Sustained Silent Reading. Moore, Jones, and Miller (1980) describe Sustained Silent Reading as "a structured activity in which students are given a fixed period of time for the silent reading of self selected material. There are no interruptions during Sustained Silent Reading, and as the program continues, the time period is gradually increased. No changing of material during the period is permitted. The teacher is also required to read and is suppose to end Sustained Silent Reading by reacting to what she/he read."

At risk students usually have a low academic performance. The class text may be too difficult which makes them unable to participate or feel part of the class activity. Sustained Silent Reading provides students with the opportunity to read material that they are able to cope with as well as what they are interested in. "Given

the opportunity, the reader who finds a really good book for himself, the book he truly wants to learn about, frequently will outdo his own instructional level of performance. (Hunt, 1970) Sustained Silent Reading allows everyone to participate in the procedure which could also improve students self concept.

At risk students are weak in the area of oral reading and feelings of inadequacy and insecurity can be a result. As they stumble over the pronunciation of sometimes easy words, they are subject to ridicule by their peers. According to Hunt (1970), "by emphasizing silent reading and tolerating mistakes, rather than indulging in endless oral reading and abusing those who make them, ultimately, better readers can be developed."

At risk students do not always have a good role model to follow. Sustained Silent Reading includes everyone including any adults present during the session. This provides a positive example to all involved.

McCracken and McCracken (1978) cite seven messages that students perceive from Sustained Silent Reading.

1) "Reading is important." The at risk student can be informed that reading is important to obtain information as well as for pleasure.

2) "Reading is something anyone can do." This is significant to at risk students since Sustained Silent Reading provides them the opportunity to succeed in a group activity.

3) "Reading is communicating with an author." Through Sustained Silent Reading and having discussions, the at risk student may begin to understand that authors use writing to communicate their ideas.

4) "Children are capable of sustained thought." Perhaps Sustained Silent Reading will give the at risk student the opportunity to reflect upon what they have read.

5) "Books are meant to be read in large sections." The at risk student may have never read an entire book on their own. Sustained Silent Reading, with the guidance of the teacher, could start these students with small books and gradually increase their reading selections so they are able to complete a book.

6) "The teacher believes the pupils are comprehending."

7) "The teacher trusts the children to decide when something is well written, when something important has been read (because the teacher expects pupils to share after Sustained Silent Reading)." The sharing of books also enhances pupils self image since at risk students are able to participate in the group activity without feeling inadequate. The students read materials that

they are interested in. This interest will hopefully spark an arousal in reading and wanting to share this new knowledge with their peers.

To successfully implement a Sustained Silent Reading program, Gambrell (1978) provides four suggestions:

1) Teacher should promote Sustained Silent Reading through an advertising campaign by using posters, bulletin boards, or book tables to enhance students interest and curiosity.

2) The teacher must provide a variety of reading materials on different readability levels.

3) Daily planned periods of Sustained Silent Reading should begin gradually and then build up to lengthen the time. Sustained Silent Reading can begin as early as kindergarten.

4) Certain guidelines should be established between the teacher and the students prior to beginning a Sustained Silent Reading program. For example, the teacher may want to discuss the importance of reading, what Sustained Silent Reading is, and what the responsibilities of the class are.

Once students are aware of the program, the teacher and the students may want to make a list of rules. McCracken (1971) cited five rules for a Sustained Silent Reading Program. (Levine 1984)

1) Each student chooses their own book.

2) Students silently read during a scheduled time period without interruptions.

3) The teacher also reads silently and does not allow interruptions.

4) The whole class reads silently together.

5) No assignments should be given. Written reports or questions could turn off the student from reading.

Rules that are visually displayed could be an asset to the at risk students as well as the class. Structure enables the students to participate in the program and be aware of limitations that may effect program results.

No follow-up assignment is also an incentive for the at risk students to succeed since they may be deficient in writing reports. "Sustained Silent Reading provides the poor reader with the opportunity to read books for enjoyment and interest, but without the fear of errors. (Levine 1984)

McCracken and McCracken (1978) studied some failures that occurred in some Sustained Silent Reading Programs. First, they found that Sustained Silent Reading worked when the teacher was a serious reader. The teacher must be a role model for the class and not allow to be distracted by minor disturbances. All adults present during Sustained Silent Reading must be reading and not

doing paperwork. If the teacher is not reading the program will not work. Second, the teacher must provide a variety of reading materials. Sustained Silent Reading will not be successful if availability of reading selections is not diversified for the students to chose. Moore, Jones, and Miller (1980) found a problem with Sustained Silent Reading when teacher's expectations of the students were too high. They found that the program needed time to be successful.

The teacher must constantly review the program to see if the students needs are met and is providing a variety of materials, as well as a good reading atmosphere. As with any program, if not monitored closely, it can stagnate. Gambrell (1978) suggests five activities to prevent this from happening.

1) Allow students to create bulletin boards pertaining to the books they read. Book sharing could arouse others to become interested in reading books.

2) The teacher could create a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere by creating a story corner with pillows and rugs.

3) Once Sustained Silent Reading has been in progress for a length of time, and students understand the procedure, they should be given the opportunity to read where they choose in the classroom. Perhaps some

students may even want to go the library during this period.

4) Other adults should be invited to share Sustained Silent Reading with your class. Other teachers, parents, or even the principal could be good role models for students. It also gives them the opportunity to be aware that all kinds of people read.

5) The teacher is a key element and role model for the students in order for the program to work. The teacher should also discuss with students their interests and the books they are reading. McCracken and McCracken (1978) concluded that "what a teacher does during and after silent reading defines silent reading for children."

Many studies have shown that Sustained Silent Reading report immediate attitude changes. Elizabeth U. Langos (1986) investigated gated the effects of Sustained Silent Reading upon students attitudes and habits toward reading in the intermediate grades. She found that two thirds of the students who participated in Sustained Silent Reading found the program an asset in developing an interest in pleasure reading and one third felt it was somewhat beneficial. Almost all the students found that their knowledge had expanded in reading as well as having a more positive attitude toward their school subjects.

Doris Burkhart (1983) studied twenty second graders who came from literate homes and a good environment. These students, although able to read, chose not to read. After ten weeks of Sustained Silent Reading, the study produced positive results. The teacher observed that the students engaged in printed material longer and exhibited positive behaviors and attitudes towards reading due to Sustained Silent Reading.

Sustained Silent Reading has also been introduced in an English language school near Bombia, India. Students in India usually are taught to read through role process and never develop good comprehension skills. Mabel Aranha (1985) found that Sustained Silent reading improved attitudes and achievements in fourth grades in India.

There has also been studies that Sustained Silent Reading reported no effect on attitude or achievement. (Harvey 1974, Summers 1979) Einhorn (1979) studied fifth graders in a parochial suburban school and found no significant differences in student's attitudes or reading habits due to Sustained Silent Reading. There was no research on Sustained Silent Reading and its effects on the attitudes or achievement of the at risk student.

"Robert Karlin (1956) studied the achievement of high school students and found students weak in reading was one of the major factors responsible for school failure and frequently the principle reason why students drop out of school." (Thein 1985) Most at risk students need to be identified at an early age and preventive measures must be taken by all concerned. Motivating students to read can perhaps improve reading achievement, build self-esteem, and keep students in school longer. "The small emphasis on Sustained Silent Reading in schools may have resulted in poor reading attitudes, habits, and achievement." (Levine 1984) According to Sadoski (1980), "the very real gains available through Sustained Silent Reading programs are most probably long term gains. The development of reading achievement, attitudes, preferences, and habits, takes time and evolves in a slow yet predictable way."

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